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A VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

CIA Chief Set Back In Bid for Low Profile

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Washington—Front-page headlines about the resignation of the CIA's deputy director of operations—America's superspy—is not exactly what William Casey had in mind. Since he took over the agency six months ago, the thrust of almost all his actions has been to return to the days of the cloak and dagger.

"The difficulties of the past decade are behind us," Casey said in an internal CIA newsletter two weeks ago as he announced that the agency's contacts with the public, the press and the Congress would be sharply curtailed. "The time has come for CIA to return to its more traditional low public profile."

To achieve that objective Casey has scuttled the agency press office, cut back on the congressional liaison staff, asked that the agency be removed entirely from the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, and is in the process of rewriting an executive order for the President that would remove some of the restrictions placed on the agency in the wake of the mid-1970s intelligence scandals.

At the same time, Casey, the 68-year-old former OSS officer during World War II, has made it clear he believes that the operations side of the agency must be revitalized. Government officials familiar with foreign policy and intelligence matters say the agency is gearing up to increase the number and scope of covert operations in such sensitive areas as Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, Central America and the Caribbean.

The resignation of Max Hugel as deputy director of operations will only make it more difficult for Casey to achieve his objectives.

Casey himself is in the headlines because of a judge's ruling that he and others misled investors in a 1968 stock deal.

Even before the Hugel case surfaced this week,

many CIA observers, in Congressional oversight concern about the direction taking the agency. The back to the "good old days" of invisible and unchecked

In fact, Hugel's appointment was controversial and was severely criticized by many in the intelligence community. He had no intelligence background and was being placed in what is regarded as the most sensitive of intelligence positions. And now it has been revealed that his background was not thoroughly or adequately checked.

Casey is asking for less restriction and oversight, but the Hugel case only emphasizes the CIA's fallibility. Even a supporter of a stronger, more traditional CIA such as Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), cochairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said yesterday, "The administration must ask itself how it allowed this disaster to come about in the first instance."

Another intelligence committee member is more concerned about the general direction of the CIA. "The jury is still out on Casey," Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) said. "But some things are becoming clear. He much prefers to operate in the dark than in the light. And his instinct, I believe, is to limit rather than increase access and cooperation. . . . That is a disturbing trend."

Biden and others say they are particularly concerned because the agency has become less forthcoming with the congressional committees. Agency witnesses are not volunteering information and the chairman of the committee, Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), is keeping more things to himself.

There is concern about the executive order because in earlier drafts the administration proposed easing the restrictions for spying on American citizens and dropped the requirement that the National Security Council be informed of all CIA operations. Both were reforms designed to eliminate abuses uncovered in the past.

And Biden and others question whether Casey and other members of the administration appreciate the limitations of covert operations and the possibilities for abuse—the agency was criticized by special Congressional committees in 1975 and 1976 for attempted assassinations, opening mail of American citizens and disregarding other Constitutional rights.